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Introduction

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Introduction

After Robert Westbrook's magistral study *John Dewey and American Democracy* (1991), research and literature on Dewey has exploded. In education alone ten to twenty doctoral dissertations (Tröhler 2000) books, articles or collections appear every year. *Understanding John Dewey* (Campbell 1995) was of central interest to anglo-saxon philosophy and history of education in the nineties. There is no similar interest in continental Europe; the renewal of interest is an anglo-saxon, and even more American concern that has no parallels in Europe. Here, philosophy of education has no core in theories of pragmatism, there are no philosophical schools centering Dewey and research concentrates on national approaches.

Before 1950 "Dewey in Europe" was somewhat of a trademark. John Dewey was firmly linked to European "progressive education" and was read and received all over the continent. There was an astonishingly strong interest in the young Soviet Union after 1917, Dewey was translated in German before 1914 and the School of Geneva (Claparède, Bovet, Piaget) was influenced by pragmatism and Dewey. "Progressive education" in Europe was no monolith, English "radical education" was quite different from French "éducation nouvelle" or German "Reformpädagogik," and even these labels did not refer to national entities. Dewey was translated in most languages and read in all camps of progressive education. Between 1918 and 1939 there was international exchange, organized mostly by the "New Education Fellowship," but this exchange did not lead to unified theories or international unity of reform-movements. Dewey, in other words, was received in national contexts of reform. To put it in slightly exaggerated terms: The "German Dewey" was very differently construed compared to the French, Italian or English Dewey.

Reception in philosophy of education had to pass national filters. While it was relatively easy to link Dewey with the philosophy of Henri Bergson in Geneva, it was impossible to bring about pragmatism and Dewey against neo-kantianism in Germany before and after 1914. Even critical theory up to Habermas showed no real interest in Dewey, at least not in his conceptions of democracy and education, although the social theories have very much in common. This seems to be changing now. After 1989 (and the fall of socialist education) interest in Dewey has increased, at least in some circles, though it cannot be compared to American research and literature. The new political and philosophical interest in Dewey has to do with the *lost* alternative "socialism", thus with the opening of Eastern Europe

and the new problems of education within a world-wide community. The topics Democracy and Education can no longer be treated with utopian concepts of “new worlds”: Political education is reduced to questions of civil society and individual development within a new order of world economics.

In this sense Dewey’s non-dualistic philosophy of education seems to open the borders of traditional philosophy of education. It strongly underlines life in *uncertainty*, it questions the rule of “aims” in education and it centers action thus the risks of education, which is no longer a holy grail. And Dewey argues that education is of central interest, a core of philosophy rather than a side affair. Our volume stresses two points: The *original interest* of European education in Dewey will be presented in case-studies, concerning different national contexts and so different Deweys. What is called the *renewal of interest* will be argued from different sides. It is our intention to show that today’s interest in Dewey is *not* the remake of the reception within the different camps of progressive education. The first question is not a pragmatic one, because Dewey left theoretical questions that were not discussed at the time of publication of *Democracy and Education* and thereafter. Theory of education today has a core of interest in pragmatism and Dewey, but this is meant as the start of theory, not as the end. Dewey is no classic in the sense of “essential truths,” his theory of education is a challenge to do better (Ryan 1995). European education is only at the beginning to appreciate the extent of this challenge.

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